

# Species with Malaysian affinities in the Sundarbans, East Pakistan

by Raymond A. Paynter, Jr.

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In April, 1958, two weeks were spent by the Harvard-Yale Expedition collecting in the tidal forests of the Sundarbans at Burigoalni, about 30 miles south of Khulna, East Pakistan. No general report on the 475 specimens collected is planned. However, four species which were breeding deserve comment because of their apparent disjunct distribution and Malaysian affinities.

On 12th April a specimen of *Picus vittatus* was collected. This, the only one of the species seen, was a female with an enlarged ovary. The species, now considered conspecific with *viridanus* (Deignan, 1955, *Ibis* 97: 18-24), was not known heretofore from west of Burma.

The specimen has an unstriated upper breast, throat, and chin, which distinguishes it from *P. vittatus viridanus*, the race that occurs over much of southeastern and central Burma and to which this bird might be expected to be referable. Instead, in size, pattern, and color it more closely resembles *eisenhoferi*, which ranges from western Burma through northern and eastern Thailand to Laos and southern Annam. However, its central rectrices are more heavily marked with white and its back is less golden than in *eisenhoferi* or in the other southeast Asia races. The throat and upper breast are more ochraceous than yellow and the green on the abdomen and lower breast is dark, thus resembling smaller *P. v. connectens* of southwestern Thailand which, contrary to Deignan, I believe is a darker subspecies than *eisenhoferi*. The white centers to the feathers of the abdomen and lower breast are narrower than in any known race.

It seems very likely that the population of the Sundarbans is geographically isolated and may be morphologically quite distinct from the presently recognized races, but more specimens are required to be certain.

*Pitta moluccensis* was a conspicuous element of the avifauna during our visit, although heretofore the species was known west of Arakan, Burma only from a single specimen collected in the Sundarbans at nearby Barisal, Bakerganj District, on 19th March, 1925. It was thought by Whistler (1934, *Journ. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 37: 222) to have been a migrant.

The species was seen often at a distance in the treetops, singing loudly. It was wary, however, and when approached dropped to the ground and became silent. A male and female were collected, both of which had very enlarged gonads.

These specimens are referable to *P. m. megarhyncha*, the race which breeds from Sumatra and nearby islands north, in the mangrove belt, along the west coast of the Malay peninsula and southwestern Thailand to Arakan.

*Pachycephala cinerea cinerea*, a widespread Malaysian bird, was in full song and relatively common at Burigoalni. The gonads were very enlarged in a series of four males and one female.

The species had not been known with certainty from west of Burma. However, on the assumption that unidentifiable *Tephrodornis grisola* Blyth, 1843 and *P. c. cinerea* Blyth, 1847 were the same bird, it was thought to range to near Calcutta. Ripley (1961, *Synopsis Birds India Pakistan*, p. 440) included the Sundarbans in the distribution on the basis of these specimens from Burigoalni.

*Dicaeum trigonostigma rubropygium* was found fairly frequently in sunny open spots within the tidal forest. A series of four specimens was in breeding condition. The bird is primarily a Malaysian and Phillipine species. It occurs sparingly in Burma and was collected many years ago in a limited area in eastern Assam (Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh District).

## Nesting of the Shoebill *Balaeniceps rex* Gould in the Bangweulu swamps

by R. A. Critchley and J. J. R. Grimsdell

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On 5th May 1970 we took part in a low-level (300 feet) aerial survey over the Bangweulu swamps and flood plains, north-eastern Zambia. The aircraft was piloted by Jack Uys, and P. Macartney was also a passenger. Twenty Shoebills were counted along the Lulimala River between Chiundaponde ( $12^{\circ} 15' \text{ S.}, 30^{\circ} 35' \text{ E.}$ ) and the Lulimala Game Camp ( $12^{\circ} 12' \text{ S.}, 30^{\circ} 07' \text{ E.}$ ). Three nests were also seen, with parents in attendance. Two of the nests contained two eggs; the other contained one egg. Another nesting pair was seen near the Kaleya Game Camp on the Lukulu River ( $11^{\circ} 55' \text{ S.}, 30^{\circ} 15' \text{ E.}$ ); the nest contained two eggs. In subsequent flights later the same month a further two nests, with birds sitting on them, were seen in the Lulimala River area, making a total of six nests seen in the whole survey.

The nests were about four feet in diameter, amongst riverine papyrus. They were easy to see from the air, as they seemed to be on islets surrounded by swamp. The surrounding vegetation had been trampled down, so that there appeared to be a round bare patch of earth, with the nest apparently constructed of ambatch in the centre.

No nests were seen during aerial surveys in the previous six months (October to April), and none were seen in the extensive, permanent swamp bordering on Lake Bangweulu itself. The habitat favoured by the Shoebill also seems to be preferred by the Sitatunga Antelope *Tragelaphus spekei* Sclater.

The only previous breeding record from the Bangweulu area is that by T. C. Fooks and others. Fooks photographed a young bird at its nest on 8th October 1961. It was considered to be some six or seven weeks old, from an egg laid perhaps in late July (Benson 1961). Thus the eggs which we saw were laid some three months earlier in the season. Apart from these Bangweulu breeding records, the only other one from south of the equator seems to be one of three young at Lake Kabamba, in the south-eastern Congo, also in October (Chapin 1932).

While the Shoebill is certainly not common in Bangweulu, our observations do at least suggest that it is holding its own there. It is to be hoped that this also applies to another area of swamp in north-eastern Zambia, the Mweru Marsh, enclosing Lake Mweru-wa-Ntipa, where in December 1964 six birds were counted in a single flight (Keith and Vernon 1969).

### References:

- Benson, C. W. 1961. The breeding of the Whale-headed Stork or Shoe-bill in Northern Rhodesia. *N. Rhod. Journ.* 4(6): 557-560.  
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